DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 471 RC 014 697

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TITLE The Value of Wilderness Orientation Programs at Colleges and Universities in the United States.
PUB DATE 2 Oct 83
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); Adventure Education; Educational Objectives; Evaluation Methods; Experiential Learning; Higher Education; *Networks; Orientation; Outdoor Activities; *Outdoor Education; *Resource Centers; *Student Adjustment; Student Attrition; Student Behavior; Summer Programs
IDENTIFIERS Fireside Summer Experience Program NH; *Outward Bound; *University of New Hampshire; *Wilderness Education Programs

ABSTRACT

A 1983 mail survey identified 34 universities and colleges utilizing the wilderness environment as a means to indoctrinate students into a school setting and resulted in: (1) the creation of a networking system of these institutions; (2) the identification of the University of Missouri at Columbia, Cornell University, Towson State University, Earlham College, and the University of New Hampshire as resource bases for dissemination of further information; and (3) a description of the 5-day Fireside Summer Experience Program of the University of New Hampshire, including program rationale, content, and evaluation techniques. The New Hampshire program attempts to provide challenging experiences that enable students to set goals, make decisions, work with others, interact with faculty, explore career choices, cope under stress, increase self-concept, assume responsibility for personal behavior, and begin positive relationships with the University and peers. Activities designed to help students reach program objectives include rock-climbing, orienteering, marathons, backpacking, service projects, hikes, night discussions, and solo and group expeditions. This program measures its effects on attrition/retention, student development, self-esteem/concept, grade point averages, attitudes toward the University, and delinquent behavior at the University. An appendix lists the participating schools, their addresses, and program directors. (NEC).

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ED242471

The Value of Wilderness Orientation Programs at Colleges and Universities in the United States

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October 2, 1983

Wilderness Orientation Programs for Universities

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RC014697

Abstract

TI: The Value of Wilderness Orientation Programs at Colleges and Universities in the United States

AU: Michael A. Gass, Coordinator of Outdoor Education

The purposes of this study were to 1) create a networking system of colleges and universities in the United States using wilderness orientation programs, 2) identify programs willing to offer informational assistance to other existing and newly developing wilderness orientation programs and 3) provide the brief rationale, program content and evaluation techniques of a currently existing wilderness orientation program (the University of New Hampshire) in order to identify some of the merits and potentialities of such programs. Effects of this program measured are: attrition/retention, student development, self-esteem/concept, GPA, attitudes towards the University, and delinquent behavior at the University.

In order to create the networking system of institutions using wilderness orientation programs, a survey was developed and distributed. Thirty-four schools were identified as using wilderness orientation programs. Five colleges and universities (University of Missouri at Columbia, Cornell University, Towson State University, Earlham College and the University of New Hampshire) were identified as resource bases for the dissemination of further information. All thirty-four schools and their program directors are listed in an appendix.

The Value of Wilderness Orientation Programs at Colleges and Universities in the United States

Introduction

Since the inception of the Dartmouth program in 1935, a number of schools have utilized the wilderness environment as a means to indoctrinate students into a school setting. Reasons for the inclusion of such a program have been extremely varied. Some universities have used wilderness orientation programs to reduce attrition; some to insure a more positive transition to college life; while others provide such a program as a means to acquaint incoming students to the school's outing program.

In the summer of 1983, a survey (see Appendix I) was mailed out to existing programs in order to disseminate information on purposes, program content and measurement techniques of wilderness orientation programs. Over 30 universities, colleges and high schools were identified (see Appendix II) and served as a data base for a presentation on such programs at the 1983 Conventions for the Association of Experiential Education (AEE) and the National Council on Outdoor Education.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of the study are:

I. To create a networking system of existing programs in the United States using wilderness orientation programs.

II. To identify programs willing to offer informational assistance to other existing and newly developing wilderness orientation programs.

III. To provide the brief rationale, program content and measuring devices of a currently existing wilderness orientation program in order to identify some of the merits and potentialities of such programs.

I. Networking System

Appendix II contains the list of 34 programs which responded to the survey. Each program was able to provide information concerning program goals, methods utilized in reaching these goals and reasons for supporting such a program.

Twenty of the programs provided some sort of follow-up experiences in order to increase the transfer of program objectives from the wilderness environment to the school setting. Examples of follow-up experiences mentioned by these twenty universities included further outdoor experiences, self-perpetuated meetings on campus by the students themselves, and scheduled meetings by the program coordinators to reinforce certain program objectives. The vast majority of programs listed further outdoor experiences and self-generated student reunions as the main methods of follow-up experiences. A small group (five) of schools used formal measuring devices to determine the effects of their program. The often used scale of measurement was a self-concept scale (e.g. The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale). The two colleges that produced the most amount of research and measurement on their programs in the study were the University of Missouri at Columbia and the University of New Hampshire.

II. Assistance to Other Programs

When the results of the survey were presented at the 1983 AEE Convention, there was an overwhelming request by the attending participants at the presentation to identify existing programs willing to offer and share information with other programs. (This question on assistance was not included on the survey, but the author's speculation concludes that most of the 34 programs listed would be willing to offer assistance to interested individuals.) Programs that stated they would be willing to offer some sort of assistance (ranging from information about their program to assistance with program development) are marked in Appendix III by ***.

III. An Example

The following is provided as an example of one program's rationale, content and method of evaluation. While many of the respondents included in the survey vastly differ from the presented program (the University of New Hampshire's program entitled "Summer Fireside Experience"), it is provided in order to increase the reader's knowledge concerning the potential value of such programs.

Rationale for the Freshman Wilderness Orientation Program at the University of New Hampshire

With the reports of declining enrollments and fewer students entering higher education, most colleges and universities are spending more and more time analyzing the variables affecting the number of students attending their institutions. One area of major concern is the startling rate of attrition in most schools of higher education. Recent reports indicate that during the first four years of college, at least 40% of entering freshmen across the United States drop out of the institution in which they are enrolled (9.p1). At the University of New Hampshire, the majority of this attrition occurs in the first year (8) - this is true for most colleges and universities.

Attrition has severe effects on both the institution and the student. The University of New Hampshire has a fixed student population of 10,500 undergraduates. The cost for the University to replace a student which drops out of the institution is extremely large from both a financial and a personal aspect. Some of the financial losses include the expense necessary to replace the student with a highly qualified transfer student, the loss of state government appropriations on a per student basis, future tuition payments, housing revenue and other university services. Some of the personal losses include the effect on the image of the university, the efficiency of education, and

the loss in the investment of personal, institutional and governmental resources (9.p3).

For some students, the effects of dropping out of school are positive ones based on healthy decisions, but for many individuals the effects are negative and often based on inappropriate reasons, sometimes resulting in disappointment and bitter reaction. These individuals often communicate a negative image of the school and this can have detrimental effects on the attempts of the admissions office to recruit potential students.

What are the major factors which bring students to leave? According to a study conducted for the ACT Conference, the following were five major factors concerning the attrition or retention of students: (16)

1) Peer isolation

2) Isolation from faculty/staff

3) Dissonance or incompatibility between initial expectations and actual circumstances

4) Academic boredom

5) Irrelevancy or lack of career planning

While this list may seem quite expansive, there are a number of ways universitites can try and overcome these obstacles.

In a review of the literature, Hansen found the following observations: (9.p5)

"1) The provision of opportunities and services to students which will help them to assimilate more mature behaviors and to integrate these behaviors into their interactions with the college environment would be likely to raise their relative development level, reduce their developmental incongruity and thus lower the risk of withdrawal. (3)

2) Programs should be geared to providing opportunities for students to

engage in activities which would facilitate developmental growth. Such programs should focus on encouraging meaningful peer group interaction and fostering vocational and lifestyle planning. (3)

3) For a student who cares to remain in college, you have to have one professor who cares, second, you have to be part of a meaningful group. (1)

4) If a student can complete the first two years successfully, the chances of withdrawing are minimal for the third and fourth years. (3)

5) Policies, programs, and services should be developed to help students master the university. (2)

6) Humanization, personalization and individualism characterizes today's generation of young adults. They are responsive to the 'treatment' that focuses on them as individuals with unique talents, interests and needs." (17)

In addition to these, research conducted at the University of New Hampshire found the following variables led students to greater success in school and therefore a higher retention rate: (7)

1) A sense of being connected. The more students acted in a meaningful way with the institution, the greater their motivation became to do well.

2) Relationship with faculty. A major factor in determining student satisfaction with the institution is the positiveness of their relationship with faculty members.

3) Student body size. The larger the school, the harder it has to work at maintaining a 'connectedness' with its students.

4) Direction to potential job market. The stronger the tie to the individual's career plans, the more satisfied the student.

5) Out of class activities. Students expect to have a variety of activities to fill their out-of-class time. The more satisfying these activities were, the more satisfied the student was with the institution.

Other studies have stressed the importance of a positive self-concept for students entering a college or university. (13) It is often seen as being a "forceful motivation in behavior" (6), a positive relation to school adjustment and achievement (6) (10) (14) and a direct association with human effectiveness. (4) (5) Motivation, adjustment, achievement and effectiveness are all traits that would assist an incoming student to a university setting. For example, Stogner (12) found that the positive effects a wilderness orientation program had on the self concept of incoming freshmen at Ferrum College led to higher GPA's in this experimental group than their control group counterparts.

It would also seem that individuals entering a university who show strong initiative taking and have strong internal reinforcement behaviors would do considerably better than their fellow students who lack these behaviors. Studies have shown that individuals who perceive control of reinforcement as originating from their own influence tend to succeed academically. (15)

Wilderness Orientation Program

Can a wilderness program bring about changes in an individual which might aid in their success when entering a university setting? Some of these changes can be seen in Smith's description of the Outward Bound process. (11.p1)

"Briefly, it is believed that the Outward Bound experience will be translated into changes in the participants' attitudes toward themselves and others. The participant will become more aware of his capabilities and limitations, will expand his capabilities, will more readily assert himself against the challenges from the environment, become more self-reliant and better able to deal with other people. There is further contention that the enhancement of these psychological characteristics has secondary effects on the achievements of participants. That is, the student or worker will do better in school, or on the job, assume positions of leadership and demonstrate positive adjustment."

An adapted Outward Bound program model has been designed at the University of New Hampshire to assist students in reaching certain objectives through direct experiences with themselves, other individuals, and the environment. It is hypothesized that by reaching these objectives, students will be better prepared to deal with the problems illustrated previously. The general goals of the wilderness orientation program at the University of New Hampshire, known as "Summer Fireside", are listed below. In parentheses after the goals are some of the specific activities designed to help students reach the objective.

The purposes of the Fireside Summer Experience Program are to:

1) Present a variety of new and challenging tasks enabling each student to set goals, make decisions, learn how to work with others and examine personal strengths and weaknesses. (Initiative tasks, bushwacking, rock-climbing, solo, night discussions, expedition planning and campcraft skills)

2) Provide experiences which will place a premium on positive interaction with faculty members. (Marathon, night discussions with a variety of faculty members and rock climbing)

3) Place students in an environment which will enable them to match personal expectations, plans for an intended major, and thoughts concerning possible career plans with opportunities available to them at the University. (Solo and night discussions)

4) Give students an awareness of how they cope in stressful situations and present comparisons to the University setting. (Rock climbing, backpacking, night discussions, initiative tasks, marathon and solo)

5) Provide the opportunity for students to begin a positive personal relationship with the University. (Service projects, interactions with faculty.)

6) Provide the opportunity for students to begin healthy relationships with peers through shared, challenging activities. (Initiative tasks, expe-

dition planning, rock climbing, night discussions and marathon)

7) Plan activities which will increase an individual's self-concept and their responsibility for their own behavior. (Night discussions, service project, rock climbing, initiative tasks, camp responsibilities, solo and expedition planning)

Program Itinerary

Day 1 Arrival
Introduction by Dean of Students
Fill out forms (e.g. equipment needed)
Introducing each other
Initiatives
Organize and pack - issue equipment
Orienteering Lesson
Drive to Pawtuckaway State Park
Hike to bouldering area
Bouldering and climbing instruction
Bushwack to Dr. McKeough's house
Discussion with McKeough and Mr. Gass, Associate and Assistant Professors at UNH, emphasis of talk on how to create positive interaction with UNH faculty and what is expected of students and faculty members at UNH
Night discussion **

Day 2 Rock climbing with Mr. Gass
Lunch discussion on the "qualities of life"
Rock climb and rappel until 3:00
Drive to Lake Chocorua (quick swim)
Hike for one mile - set up camp
Night discussion ** - risk taking and goal setting at UNH, etc.

Day 3 Hike to the summit of Mt. Chocorua and down 1/4 mile
Bandana exercise
Discussion of male and female roles in our society and at school, where to go for resources at the University, etc.
Night discussion **

Day 4 Sunrise hike to the top of Mt. Chocorua
Solo and write letter to oneself (approximately 8 hours)
Hike out to trail head
Travel to Ev Browne's house (Professor Emerita at UNH)
Stay in Yurt
Night discussion **

Day 5 Service project for the University
Talk with Ev Browne on her experiences with students in working at UNH for 38 years with students, what UNH has to offer for students and how to go about receiving it, what students at UNH have given her, etc.
Walk to the ocean for environmental activities
Run from Ev's to the UNH campus - support from faculty
Final debriefing
Graduation

Follow-up activities

1) Slide show
2) Receive self-written letter in the mail
3) Reunions - self-perpetuated
4) Poem and letter from Mike Gass

** Examples of possible night discussions

- Problem solving skills
- Leadership/followership skills
- Information sharing
- Responsibility for oneself and others
- Values clarification
- Decision making
- Skill identification
- Goal setting
- Information on the University
- Matching educational plans and career goals
- Time management
- Establishing 'connectedness' between self and University
- Various student roles at the University
- Friendship
- Aloneness verses togetherness

Methods of Program Evaluation

Items analyzed by the program:

1) Attrition/retention
2) Student development - this is measured by the Student Development Task Inventory Instrument. The instrument measures the following items:
   a) Emotional autonomy
   b) Instrumental autonomy
   c) Interdependence
   d) Intimate relationships with opposite sex
   e) Mature relationships with peers
   f) Tolerance
   g) Apropriate educational plans
   h) Mature career plans
   i) Mature lifestyle plans

Information concerning this instrument can be obtained by writing to:

Student Development Associates, Inc.
110 Crestwood Drive
Athens, Georgia 30605

3) Self-esteem using the OBE (Outward Bound Effects) Inventory or the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale
4) Attitudes toward the University
5) Grade point average
6) Delinquent behavior at the University

Ancillary Analyses Measured:

1) Sex (male/female)
2) In-state students/out-of-state students
3) Rural community/urban community
4) SAT scores

APPENDIX I

unh
UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DURHAM, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03824

Department of Physical Education
New Hampshire Hall
(603) 862-2070

June 13, 1983

I am currently conducting research concerning the use of Wilderness Orientation Programs as a means for introducing students to a school setting. In the process of my research, the name of your Program was listed in one of a variety of sources as having such a Program. I would appreciate your help in responding to the following questions:

1) In compiling this research, I have become aware of quite a few Wilderness Orientation Programs. Here is a list of the current programs that I am aware of:

Antioch College
Bloomsburg State College
Colorado College
Colorado Rocky Mountain School
Cornell University
College of Wooster
Dartmouth College
Earlham College
Gould Academy
Hampshire College
Harvey Mudd College
Idaho State University
Kalamazoo College
Linfield College
Northland College
Prescott Center College
Radford College
Ricks College
St. Mark's School of Texas
Trinity College
Towson State University
University of Missouri-Columbia
University of Montana
University of New Hampshire
University of New York at New Paltz
University of Oregon
Walkabout
Webster College
West Liberty State College
Wheaton College
William Penn College

Are you aware of any other Wilderness Orientation Programs? If you are, could you please list them in your response.

2) What are the goals or purposes of your Program?

3) How do you go about reaching these goals?

4) How do you evaluate the success of your Program? Is there a testing instrument and/or evaluation form that you use?

5) Do you provide a "follow-up" of any sort to aid your Program's goals?

6) Why do you have such a Program? Why do you conduct it in the wilderness?

Any other information you could supply would be of great benefit! Some of this material will be in my research project being conducted at the University of New Hampshire in our Outdoor Education Program and some will be used in a presentation at the National AEE (Association of Experiential Education) Conference to be held this fall in Lake Geneva, Illinois.

Please use the enclosed, stamped envelope. If you have any questions, please enclose them and I will try to do my best to answer them.

Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Michael Gass

Michael A. Gass
Coordinator of Outdoor Education
Department of Physical Education

MAG/rh

Enclosure

603-862-2070

APPENDIX II

Wilderness Orientation Program Survey

Karl T. Mahle
Wilderness Orientation Program
Antioch College
1440 Glenview Road
Yellow Springs, OH 45387

Up Reach
c/o Bill Proudman
QUEST Program
Kehr Union
Bloomsburg University
Bloomsburg, PA 17815

Wilderness Program
Dr. Donna Berglind
College of Wooster
Wooster, OH 44691

David T. Ives
Assistant Dean of Students
Freshman Orientation Program
Rastall Center
Colorado College
Colorado Spring, CO 80903

Wilderness Session
c/o Gordon Stanington
Colorado Rocky Mountain School
Carbondale, CO 81623

***Wilderness Reflections
Room 534, Willard Straight Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14850

Outing Club Director
Dartmouth Outing Club
P.O. Box #9
Dartmouth College
Hanover, NH 03755

***Margaret Lechner
Wilderness Director
Earlham College
Box E-87
Richmond, IN 47374

Joseph Stogner
Wilderness Challenge Program
Ferrum College
Ferrum, VA

Environmental Survival Program
Dave VanNess
Gould Academy
Bethel, ME 04217

Octabio G. Boubion
Upward Bound Program
Harvey Mudd College
Claremont, CA 91711

I.S.U. Student Union Outdoor Program
Program Coordinator
Idaho State University
Box 8118
Pocatello, Idaho 83209

David Winch
Experiential Education
Kalamazoo College
Kalamazoo, MI 49001

Linfield Out-of-Doors
Dr. John E. Hanson
Dean of the College.
Linfield College
McMinnville, OR 97128

Grant P. Herman
Wilderness Orientation Program
Northland College
Ashland, WI 54806

Mike Goff
Prescott Center College
220 Grove Avenue
Prescott, Arizona 86301

Carolyn Norman
Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Services
Radford College
Radford, VA 24141

Richard Clark
Dept. of Outdoor Experiences & Resources
Ricks College
Rexburg, Idaho 83440

Wilderness Program Director
Touch of Nature Center
S. Illinois University at Carbondale
Carbondale, IL 62901

S.M. Donaldson or Current Director
St. Marks School of Texas
10600 Preston Road
Dallas, TX 75230

***Project Marj
c/o Craig Dobkin
Towson Center, Dept. of P.E.
Towson State University
Towson, MD 21204

Jane Millspaugh
Freshman Seminar: Learning, Exp.
and the Environment
Ferris Athletic Center
Trinity College
Hartford, CT 06106

Boojum Institute
University of California at
Riverside
P.O. Box 112
Riverside, CA 92521

Chuck Gormby
Wilderness Discovery Program
Campus Recreation
C-017
University of California, San Diego
La Jolla, CA 92037

Jim Rennie
Outdoor Education Program
University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho 83843

***Robert N. Hansen
QUEST
105 Noyes
University of Misscuri, Columbia
Columbia, MO 65211

***Summer Fireside Program
c/o Michael A. Gass
Coordinator of Outdoor Education
Department of P.E.
New Hampshire Hall
University of New Hampshire
Durham, NH 03824

Dee Edelman, Director
Venture Program
University of North Carolina at
Charlotte
Charlotte, NC 28223

Bruce Mason
Outdoor Program
Erb Memorial Union - Room #23
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

Dave Becker
Wilderness Program
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, Utah 84112

Wilderness Experience
Graydon Gray Williamson
Department of English
West Liberty State College
West Liberty, WV 26074

Bud Williams
Outdoor Orientation Program
Wheaton College
Wheaton, IL 60187

Human Relations Field Trip Program
Freshman Orientation Adventure
John Mothershead
William Penn College
Oskaloosa, IO 52577

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